

Coins

Confederate bills may have value

By Roger Boye

I have three confederate bills in denominations of \$500, \$100, and \$5. They were hanging on my garage wall and are very brown. Are they valuable?

Z. S., Wilmington, Del.

The Confederate States of America issued about 75 varieties of paper money in denominations ranging from 50 cents to \$1,000, and many Confederate states also printed currency during the Civil War. Obviously, I would need much more information to evaluate your bills, including details about the design, color, and issue date.

Although some Confederate currency is rare, many pieces in good condition are sold by collectors for less than \$5. Also, there are thousands of counterfeit Confederate notes, some printed on wrinkled brown paper to appear old. Have your bills examined by an expert who will scrutinize the paper, color, and design to determine their authenticity.

Coin World magazine has listed some of the most common fake Confederate bills that have been observed by the editors of Collectors' Clearinghouse.

My husband and I just returned from a European vacation and were fascinated by the colors some countries use in their money. Why doesn't the United States government make bills in more than one color?

S.V., Chicago.

Use of the same color helps prevent counterfeiting, because users are forced to look at the design rather than the color, Treasury Department officials say.

"Diverting user attention from the fidelity of the printed images would increase the probability of lower-quality notes being passed," Treasury Secretary Michael Blumenthal said.

I have two proof sets, 1951 and 1952, but the coins have not been stored properly. Consequently, they are tarnished and corroded. How can I clean them?

P.G., Chicago.

Most coin experts say the same thing about cleaning coins: Don't. As one long-time dealer said, "Probably for every one coin 'improved' by cleaning, 10 have had their value lessened."

But if the temptation is too great, buy a liquid "coin dip" on sale at some coin stores and practice using the product on common-date coins. Carefully follow the directions on the container, or ask the dealer for hints, because he has probably used the product. Better yet, have a dealer or other expert clean them.

I've found some old silver certificate \$1 bills that have pencil and fold markings. Can the bills be cleaned?

C.R., Wheaton.

As with coins, the best advice is to let them be. If you must try something, use a soap eraser on pencil marks, being careful not to tear the paper.

To eliminate dirt and wrinkles, one source suggests soaking the bills in warm water, rubbing them gently with a mild soap, and then rinsing the notes with warm water. After that, eliminate the wrinkles by flattening the wet notes on a piece of glass and using a paper towel to soak up as much moisture as possible. Then place each damp note in a heavy book to dry, using sheets of plain paper between the bills and book pages.

COLLECTORS IN the St. Louis area have a special treat next weekend — the annual convention of the Central States Numismatic Society at the St. Louis Chase-Park Plaza Hotel. Show organizers expect 4,000 persons to visit the 175 dealers. The three-day show starts Friday and will include the usual exhibits, auction, and educational forum.

Questions about coins and collecting? Send them to Roger Boye, Room 414, Chicago Tribune, 435 N. Michigan Av., Chicago, Ill. 60611. Enclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope for a personal reply, and do not send coins.